

## Echoes of Light

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Summary: AU - Qui-Gon, Obi-Wan, and Anakin follow a lead to seek out an initiate who's been missing for ten years. They trace her to an ancient Sith Temple on the planet Brentos, and must try and rescue her as well as finding their own way out.

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/ See the end of the chapter for some notes on this AU /

The closer they'd gotten to this place, the quieter the forest had become. The sounds of animals, birds, and insects, had faded away as the remains of the ancient road leading here had become more defined. They stood at the very edge of the clearing, just inside the line of trees that had become less lush, and more twisted, as they closed in. The courtyard itself was of bare stone flags with not even a hint of grass poking between the wide cracks.

It was so quiet here that it was hard to believe there was a bustling city only a few dozen kilometers away.

"This looks like a bad idea, Master," Anakin muttered, staring at the flat walls of a three sided pyramid in the center of a shattered courtyard.

Qui-gon agreed, but laid a hand on his Padawan's shoulder, "But, we must continue on. Fear should never hold you back from doing what is right."

"Even when doing what is right definitely seems like a bad idea," Obi-Wan, on Anakin's other side, chimed in helpfully.

Anakin frowned, replying seriously, "Probably especially then, right? I mean it's scary and all but if we have a chance to help, we kind of have to."

The older master smiled down at his apprentice, then met the eyes of his former Padawan, now Knight, over the boy's head. Anakin was both clever and kind, something it had taken more than two years to convince the likes of Mace, who was still leery of a student beginning at such a late age, that Anakin would make a great Jedi. He'd been, and probably still was skeptical, possible 'chosen one' or no, even after five years with the Order. The councillor would not approve of this little adventure, which is why none of them had informed the High Council that they were coming to Brentos to look for an initiate gone missing nearly ten years ago. No, this was a favor for a friend.

All three of them sobered as they turned their attention to ruins of the purported Sith temple. The dark side flowed there, choking off the life of the forest surrounding it, but it wasn't as overwhelming as the last stronghold of the Darkness they'd found themselves in. Of course, this place hadn't been tenanted for decades as the tower they'd discovered using Darth Maul's navicomputer had been, or even the three caches of artifacts and information they'd uncovered in the years since they'd captured the Sith Apprentice on Naboo.

Their eyes followed the same track, going to the shuttle that rested on the stones a little ways apart from the doors. It was nothing like Maul's sleek ebony transport, with crimson running lights and dramatic flair. It looked like any small ship a merchant or courier might possess, with scratched paint along the sides but probably more firepower than a courier would think necessary. It didn't have an ominous name as the Sith's craft had either, merely a generic designation number.

"I'm sure we'd all prefer to stay outside, Master," Obi-Wan said, taking the first step out into the sunlight, "but I'd rather we get the drop on them instead of giving them time to lay an ambush inside."

Anakin felt ridiculous as the Knight looked over his shoulder at them and flushed sheepishly. He'd almost expected a trap to be sprung, or some monster to rear up just from walking out onto the broken stones. Still, he waited for his Master to follow Obi-Wan before falling into step at their heels.

It was, Anakin thought, appropriately gloomy inside as they walked into the first large chamber of the temple. He could hear a steady drip of water from several places, falling onto stone in little plinks and into pools with small splashes. It smelled wet here, but as he'd expected from the outside there was no scent of mold or any kind of growing things.

The Dark Side here welcomed no life within the walls of this sanctum.

Qui-Gon looked around them with a small amount of curiosity leavened with massive amounts of caution. The bright sunlight from outside illuminated the great room rather well, and he heard Anakin mutter to Obi-Wan that he'd somehow expected it to be dark anyway no matter how much light there was in the courtyard. There had either been a battle here, the last time it had been occupied, or it had been thoroughly looted in a violent fashion, or someone had simply set out to destroy and vandalize as much as possible at some other point in time. Probably it was a combination of all of those things.

He held up a hand, "There are footprints here," he said, keeping his voice low, "three sets I think."

Obi-Wan crouched, examining one of the prints. He drew out a glow-rod and held it out over it, "It's small, a small human I think," he said, "which is what we were expecting. Anakin, look here," he pointed to the edges, "See how clear the print is? They were walking slowly, not in a hurry at all. But those over there are more blurred, perhaps running or even just carrying something heavy."

Anakin looked down, carefully stepping around the prints in front of the Knight and then moving to look at the others further away, "These are little bit bigger," he informed them, "and the ones next to them are about that size too."

"Still," Qui-Gon said, "both of those sets are too small to be Dardann's, and the shape of them don't look like a man's boots at all."

Obi-Wan stood and tucked away the light source, "Which means it might be that he sent his apprentice and some others to fetch something for him here, or it could be we're following someone else entirely."

"For Master Hivvis' sake, I hope we're on the right track," Qui-Gon said, "if we had time to wait for him I'd say we would, but it will take him at least three days to untangle himself from his duties and join us."

The Chagrian Jedi Master had never stopped looking for the initiate he'd been entrusted with finding after the ship delivering her to one of the Republics agri-worlds had been commandeered by pirates. It was something that had given Qui-Gon uneasy dreams of his own, remembering what could have happened if he'd declined more stringently to go on the journey to Bandomeer on the same transport as Obi-Wan. It could have been him who'd vanished, not just taken by pirates but then being taken from the pirates by something far worse.

He'd not been privy to the messages, recordings, and mocking 'reports' that the fallen Jedi Dardann had sent to the council, and for that he was guiltily glad. He didn't want to see, although he'd come to know the details over the years of what had been done to the girl, but Hivvis had refused to look away from any of it. He'd been assigned the mission as a neutral party, having never encountered the young human before, but he'd becomeâ€¦ not obsessed as one or two members of the council claimed, but definitely driven.

The small footprint matched reports of Iocina Denara who was small for a human, inches shorter than fifteen-year-old Anakin at the age of twenty-two.

Qui-Gon looked up suddenly as a warning from the Force screamed at him for attention, Anakin stumbling against him and going pale.

"Obi-Wan? Don't say the words," Anakin said in a flat tone as he felt something twist in his stomach. He wound his hand in his Master's cloak to keep his balance. He'd always trusted his feelings, it had

been one lesson he hadn't needed to learn after becoming a Padawan. He'd merely needed to strengthen his senses, to learn which direction to look or what in particular to listen to at any given moment. Just then, he felt as though he was riding a speeder bike at breakneck speeds and gone into a sudden dip.

"I wasn't!" Obi-Wan retorted, reaching out a hand to steady himself on a pillar. The moment his fingers touched the cold stone a grinding noise screeched behind them.

The Knight and the Master turned, lightsabers in hand and ignited, as the door they'd assumed had been stuck open for millennia ground shut. They were left in a darkness lit only by the humming blue and green blades, augmented after a moment by Anakin's own pale blue 'saber as he joined his light to theirs.

"Don't say it," Anakin groaned.

Qui-Gon sighed, "He didn't have to say it, Padawan," his voice was dry, "He doesn't really have to say it, chaos doesn't follow in its wake, it follows chaos."

Obi-Wan offered him a weak grin, "I did have a bad feeling about that," he said, raising his eyes to the ceiling high above them, "but as it was probably my touching something that set it off, I concede your point."

A soft scraping sound wiped the self deprecating amusement from Obi-Wan's expression. He looked toward the sound, but the darkness was too deep down the hallway he thought it came from. They listened, hearing the sound again before realizing it was moving away. Someone, hopefully 'someone' and not 'something' had seen them and was trying to creep away.

"Don't worry," he said softly, "I don't feel the need to say it again, but I think we'll need to follow quickly."

Qui-Gon nodded and took the lead, putting Anakin in the middle between them as Obi-Wan took the rear.

"Am I allowed to have a ba-" Anakin's words were cut off as Obi-Wan snaked a hand around and clamped it over his mouth.

"No, you aren't."

\* \* \*

><p>Note:<p>

This is actually the first time I've tried writing these characters, so I hope I'm getting them right at least a little bit. Obviously its an AU, Qui-Gon survived the fight with Darth Maul and took him into custody. They've spent the last five years trying to uncover who Maul's master is - tracking down a lot of their hidey-holes and cleaning them out.

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file.